

Healthy Homes: booklet series

Dust & Dust Mites

Identify the Problem:



Many different things can be found in common household dust: fabric lint, microscopic wall paint chips, tree and flower pollen, tracked-in soil, pet dander and cigarette smoke particles.

But the most common and abundant element in household dust is microscopic dead skin cells that naturally flake off our own bodies.

To make matters worse, there exist small bugs called “dust mites” that eat the skin cells in dust. Therefore, dust mites exist everywhere we go.

A protein found in dust mite droppings is a very common allergen; it can trigger asthma symptoms and a variety of allergic reactions.

It is very important that we keep dust to a minimum in our homes, especially if someone in the household has allergies or asthma.

What Can They Do?

Dust and dust mites can cause a wide variety of symptoms and illnesses, but most often bring on breathing problems: wheezing, shortness of breath, sinus problems, sneezing, and stuffy nose.

Dust mite allergies can also cause itchy eyes or itchy skin. In extreme cases, they can trigger violent allergic reactions, and they very commonly bring on asthma attacks for people with a history of asthma.

Where Are Dust Mites?

Wherever humans are, dust mites will be present too. Of course, there are some places where we spend more time and will often have higher concentrations of mites.

Generally, since we spend a quarter to a third of our lives asleep, dust mites are found in large amounts in our beds: sheets, blankets, mattresses, pillows, and pillowcases.



Dust mites also thrive on floors, rugs and carpets, as well as in furniture, laundry, and in children's toys and stuffed animals.

Our schools and workplaces are equally at risk for high quantities of dust mites.

Take Action Against Dust Mites

There are many ways that you can reduce the number of dust mites in your home.

- ▶ Sweep and vacuum your entire home at least once a week.
- ▶ Dust your house or apartment regularly and do not allow dust to collect on floors, furniture, cabinets, appliances, or shelves.
- ▶ Change your bed sheets, blankets and pillow cases once a week and wash them in hot water.
- ▶ Change air filters from heating and cooling systems frequently.
- ▶ Change the catch bags from your vacuum cleaner often.



Take Action Against Dust Mites



- ▶ Mattress and pillowcase covers prevent dust mites from hiding inside pillows and the soft padding of your bed. These covers are zippered, plastic-lined bags that completely surround the mattress and pillow.
- ▶ Dust mites like higher humidity levels. Fortunately, humidity is not usually a problem in New Mexico!
- ▶ Choose washable toys and stuffed animals for your children, and wash them in hot water regularly, allowing them to dry thoroughly.

Other Resources

**The Environmental Protection Agency's
dust mite information:**

1-800-548-8252 www.epa.gov/iaq/asthma/dustmites.html

American Lung Association

1-800-LUNG-USA www.lungusa.org

The Allergy & Asthma Network: Mothers of Asthmatics
www.aanma.org

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